

*The Pestilence Abroad, and the Per-
plexity of our Affairs at Home, con-
sider'd and improved:*

IN A
SERMON

PREACH'D IN

EXON,

March 1. 1720.

AND

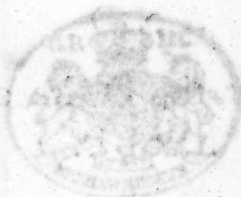
Now Publish'd at the Desire of several who
heard it.

By JOHN WITHERS.

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M. DCC. XXI.





MICAH vi. the latter part of v. 9.

*Hear ye the Rod, and who hath
appointed it.*



IN the preceding Verses of this Chapter, God, by his Prophet *Micah*, upbraids the *Jews* with their disingenuous Carriage towards him, from whom they had receiv'd so many Favours. He appeals even to their own Reasons for the Equity of his Proceedings, and the Perverseness of theirs. O my Ver. 3. People, what have I done unto thee? Wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. What intolerable Burthen have I ever laid upon thee? What unreasonable Thing have I required of thee? I defy the most peevish and discontented of you all, to give one Instance of an unjust Severity and Rigour. Having expostulated the Matter with

with them, he proceeds to advise them how to demean themselves, when his impending Judgments were, like a Rod, shaken over their guilty and provoking Heads. This Counsel is addressed to them in the Words of my Text:

Hear the Rod, and who hath appointed it. In which Words you may take notice of these two Parts.

1. Here are some things suppos'd, or taken for granted; *viz.* That God's Judgments upon a Nation are a Rod; that this Rod is in his Hand, he appoints and directs it: That it has a Voice which commands our Attention.

2. Here is a Duty inferr'd, *Hear ye the Rod, &c.*

1. 'Tis supposed, or taken for granted, that national or particular Judgments are God's Rod. Various are the Dispensations of Divine Providence. Various the Methods which he takes to awaken a secure and careless World. He instructs us, sometimes by his Word, and sometimes by his Rod: Sometimes by the Messengers he employs, and sometimes by the Judgments he inflicts. When Persons grow unmindful

ful of their God and Duty, he makes himself known to the Children of Men by terrible Things in Righteousness. He hath a corrective, smarting Rod, with which, he chastises the Frowardness and Peevishness of his own Children: He hath also a Rod of Iron, with which he rules rebellious Nations, and dashes them in pieces like a Potter's Vessel. *I am the Man that hath seen* Lam. iii. i. *Affliction by the Rod of his Wrath*, says the Prophet in the Name of the Jewish Church. God's Rod lay very heavy upon their Shoulders, when this Complaint was made. Their Land was ravaged by a proud, victorious Enemy: Their choice young Men were slain with the Sword; their Nobles bound in Chains, and their Princes in Fetters of Iron. *Jerusalem*, that was once great among the Nations, and Princess among the Provinces, lay buried in its Dust, and entomb'd in its own Ruins. So that they were smarting under the Rod of God's Indignation. God calls *Assyria the Rod of* Isa. x. 5. *his Anger*: He made use of that ambitious, cruel Nation to avenge the Quarrel of his broken Covenant; and to execute his Wrath upon a perfidious, ungrateful People.

Again, as Judgments are a Rod, so 'tis in God's Hand, at his Appointment, under his Management and Direction. There is

no Evil in the City, and the Lord hath not done it. By which we are to understand, the Evil, not of Sin, but of Affliction. He kills, and he makes alive; he wounds, and he heals, and in all those Instances he acts as an uncontrouled Sovereign. The Calamities which private Persons, or publick Societies may labour under, are the Results, not of a blind Chance, or giddy Fortune, but of an over-ruling Providence, and wise Counsel. The Sword or Pestilence cannot destroy without a Divine License and Permission.

And as Judgments are a Rod in God's Hand, so 'tis supposed that this Rod hath a Voice, or else we should be under no Obligation to hear it. Which leads me to

2. The second Thing observable in these Words; and that is the Duty inferr'd, *Hear ye the Rod*: Or, in other words, consider what God calls you to, by the Afflictions with which he visits you. And here, that I may accommodate my Discourse to the present Posture of Affairs, I shall entertain you with this following Method.

I. I shall consider in what Instances God by his Rod or Judgments may be said to be calling to us this Day.

II. What

II. What are the Duties God calls us to, or what are the Lessons his Dispensations seem calculated to instruct us in.

III. Conclude all with some practical Inferences.

I. I shall consider in what Instances God by his Rod or Judgments may be said to be calling to us this Day.

1. God's Rod may be considered as calling to us in the Perplexity of our Affairs at home. What an unexpected Turn have they taken within these few Months past? How miserably are they this Day embarrassed? Commerce decays and languishes; and Publick Credit hath receiv'd a dreadful Shock. The Stagnation of Trade in the *Body Politick*, like that of the Blood and Spirits in the *Body Natural*, threatens the whole with terrible Convulsions, if not with a total Dissolution. How many wealthy Families have been impoverished? How many industrious Artificers have nothing else to do but to hang their Instruments *upon the Willows*; and instead of *Sion's Songs*, to hear the Cries of their half famish'd Children? And how are our wisest State Physicians

ficians nonplus'd to find out a Remedy adequate to the Disease?

God's Rod may be considered as calling to us in that dreadful Pestilence which rages in our neighbouring Nation. This, like a black Cloud, hangs hovering over our Heads, and God only knows, how soon it may break in Pieces about our Ears. That Angel, which stands with a drawn Sword over *France*, waits only for a Divine Commifion to step over into *England*. The Plague is a Rod in God's own Hand: When he inflicts this Judgment, he makes not use of Men to be the Instruments of his Wrath, as in War and other Cases. *When you are gathered together in your Cities, I will send the Pestilence among you*, saith the Lord. And who can save, if he gives it a Commission to destroy? 'Tis compar'd, by the Psalmist, *to an Arrow that flieth by Day*. To which I may add, that 'tis an Arrow taken out of God's Quiver; and if he lets it fly, there is no Armour Proof against it. If he bids this Enemy go, it scales the highest Walls, leaps over the widest Trenches, breaks thro' the strongest Guards, routs and disperses the best disciplin'd and most compacted Armies. The Pestilence indeed is said to *walk in Darknes*s; but it derives

Lev. xxvi.
25.

Pf. xcvi. 5.

derives its destructive Force and Efficacy from the *Father of Lights*. From him comes down, not only every *good and perfect Gift*, but every terrible, amazing Judgment. 'Tis a Sword weilded by Omnipotence it self, and when 'tis drawn forth against any People, who can expresse the Terror and Consternation it carries with it, and is the Occasion of? But of this more largely hereafter. I come now to

II. The second general Head, which is to consider what the Rod of God calls us to, or what are those Lessons, which his Judgments seem calculated to instruct us in. And if we consider these Judgments as gone forth against us in the Decay of Trade, and the Ruin of publick Credit, they seem to call upon us,

I. To observe the Shallowness of all human Counsels. We have seen Men, famous for their Subtilty and Cunning, eminent for their Sagacity and Foresight, exquisitely skill'd in all the dark Intrigues of State: We have seen such as these ruin'd in'd by their own Projects, confounded by their own Schemes, and impoverished by those very Methods which they made use of to enrich themselves. Their Mountain hath been shaken by an Earthquake
when

when they thought it strongest. 'T would be neither decent nor human for us in a private Station, to insult, or trample upon any of those unhappy Persons, whose ill Conduct hath drawn upon them the Resentments of an injured Nation, and who are in the Hands of publick Justice, where it becomes us to leave them. But surely, we may be allow'd to say, that by this Dispensation God loudly calls to us in the Words of his ancient Prophet: *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, let not the wise Man glory in his Wisdom, let not the rich Man glory in his Riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord that exerciseth Loving-kindness, Judgment and Righteousness.* How easily can God infatuate the wisest Politicians, and turn the Counsels of an *Achitophel* into Foolishness? Experience, as well as Scripture, may inform us, that 'tis not the Activity and Wit of Man, but the Blessing of God *that maketh rich, and addeth no Sorrow with it.* Men may contrive with Prudence, and execute with Vigour, and yet their Designs may prove abortive. Ten thousand Accidents may intervene, which they are neither able to foresee, nor to prevent. God hath convinc'd this Nation by sad Experience, how dim, and short-sighted those Eyes are which yet pretend

pretend to the greatest Penetration. I make no question, but many wise Men and true Patriots were heartily persuaded, that the Scheme laid down about twelve Months since, for lessening the National Debts, would have answered that noble End: But we see, that by the Avarice of some, the Credulity of others, and the just Judgment of God upon a provoking People, the quite contrary has happened: and the publick Incumbrances have been increas'd by the Methods propounded to reduce them. This may convince us, that the profoundest Judgments are very shallow, that no Design form'd *without*, as well as *against* the Lord, will ever prosper; and that the best concerted Measures will certainly miscarry unless he succeeds them.

2. God's Judgments this Day upon us seem intended to let us see the unsatisfactory Nature of all worldly Enjoyments. This is another Lesson we should learn by that Rod that is upon our Backs. Have we not seen the Observation of the wise Man verified? *He that loveth Silver shall not be satisfied with Silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase.* The heaping up of Wealth on a greedy Mind, is like pouring Oyl upon the Fire, which, instead of extinguishing, feeds and increases

Ecclef. v.

10.

ses the Flame. Had our late Managers been content, I will not say with moderate, but with very considerable Gains, their Reputation might have been safe, their Consciences easy, and this Nation, instead of being the Jest, might have been the Envy of all its Neighbours: But by grasping immense Treasures, by aiming at such prodigious Acquisitions, as were never heard of in any Age before, they have brought down Infamy, if not Ruin, upon their own Heads, and a terrible Calamity upon the whole Kingdom. If we reflect upon the Transactions of the last Year, we shall find, that they were most eager in the Pursuit of Wealth, who had least occasion for it. No Eye more greedy than that which *stood out with Fatness*. No Heart more enlarg'd in its Desires, than his who possessed more than he could reasonably wish for. They who enjoy'd the greatest Estates were as forward as any to make Additions to their vast Heaps. Hence it came to pass, that in the late general Infatuation, and Scramble for Gold and Silver, the Sons of Nobles did not disdain to mingle with such as sprang from Dunge-hills; nor Stars and Garters to converse with Brokers and Stock-jobbers. In one Word, the universal Hurry this Nation was lately in, when Persons of all Ranks were

were upon the Hunt for Riches, proclaims the unsatisfactory Nature of all worldly Enjoyments.

3. God's Rod instructs us also in the precarious, uncertain Nature of earthly Treasures: Experience as well as Scripture tells us, that *Riches make themselves Wings, and fly as an Eagle towards Heaven*, for a new Disposal of them. How many wealthy Traders have been impoverished by the unexpected Turn of Affairs? How many flourishing Families have been reduc'd to narrow Circumstances, if not extreme Penury? They that were once ready to *give*, are now under a Necessity of *receiving*: And their own Eyes have seen *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit* engraven upon what they thought most durable and lasting. Nay, how many have lost the *Substance*, in catching at a *Shadow*, and parted with good substantial Farms upon the firm *Ground*, in order to build Castles in the *Air*? How many have had their Teeth set on Edge by those sower Fruits which spring from that which is the *Root of all Evil*? And by *hasting to be rich*, have (according to Solomon's Prediction) discovered *an evil Eye*; and *brought down Poverty upon themselves*.
 God had formerly told us by his *Word*,
 C that

Prov.

xxiii. 5.

Prov.

xxviii. 22.

that the *Fashion of this World passeth away* : And now he hath loudly proclaimed this Truth in our Ears, by the awakening Voice of his *Rod*. By this he tells us, that all Things here below are subject to Vicissitudes and Changes, and that if we act as become wise Men, much more as sincere Christians, we shall seek for something more real and substantial than what this World is able to afford us.

4. God's Judgments also call upon us to secure for our selves those Riches that can be never taken from us: or, in the Words of our blessed Saviour, to *lay up for our selves Treasures in Heaven*. Treasures that will survive the Ruins of the World, the Envy of Time, and the dismal Conflagration of all Things. Treasures that will not perish or decay, when the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat, when the Earth and all that therein is shall be burnt up with Fire. Notwithstanding all the Disappointments you have met with, all the Straits and Difficulties you labour under, you may obtain a Title to those Riches, which Thieves and Robbers cannot plunder, which Knaves and Cheats cannot defraud you of. God, by his Dispensations, seems to speak to his Churches in *England*
now,

now, as he did to that of *Laodicea* formerly; *I counsel thee to buy of me Gold* Rev. iii. 18. *tried in the Fire, that thou mayst be rich, and white Raiment that thou mayst be clothed, that the Shame of thy Nakedness do not appear.* The poorest, the meanest

of you all may make this advantageous Purchase, if you are not wanting to your selves. Not that you can give an Equivalent, or valuable Consideration for present Grace, or future Glory: But these may be procured by you, upon the Account of Christ's Merits, and by the Assistance of his Spirit. And this is the Improvement which both Rich and Poor should make of the present Dispensations of Divine Providence. When you hear of some who have been *burnt*, of others who have been *bubbled* out of their well furnished Houses, you should be excited to seek for a *City which hath Foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.* When you see Men lose their Estates by other's Knavery, their own Folly, or by the Providence of God; your great Concern should be to secure to your selves a Title to an *Inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* How cautious and wary should we be, when we see others prick their Fingers by grasping the World with too much Eagerness? The Disappoint-

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ments which so many of our Countrymen have lately met with in their Affairs, should suggest to us such Thoughts as these. Shall I *pant after the Dust of the Earth*, when I have seen others almost choak'd, by swallowing it with too much Greediness? The Prediction of St. *Paul* hath been fulfilled in my Sight. *They that will be rich run into a Snare, and pierce themselves thro' with many Sorrows.* And shall I suffer my self to be transported by the same unreasonable Passion? Shall I disquiet my self in vain? Disturb and vex my Soul in the Pursuit of what I am not sure to keep one Moment longer? Shall I trust in those Riches which are so uncertain? No; I am resolv'd, through the Assistance of Divine Grace, to chuse Heaven for my Portion; let others contend and scramble for larger Shares of this dirty Earth.

8 Tim. vi.
9, &c.

I come next to enquire what Lesson God seems to be teaching us, by his Rod laid upon a neighbouring Nation. And here

1. His Judgments call upon us to fear, and stand in Awe of his dreadful Majesty. By terrible things in Righteousness he makes himself known to the Children of Men. He discovers himself to be an holy, a Sin revenging

vengeing God. *The Lion hath roared, who* Amos iii.
will not fear? The Lord hath spoken, &c. 8.

If the Lion roars the Beasts of the Forest tremble, afraid of being torn in pieces by a superior Power: And should not rational Creatures be more concern'd when an Omnipotent God gives signal Instances of his Displeasure, against a profane and wicked Generation? Shall not we tremble when he lets fly his poisoned Arrows, and fixes them in the Bosom of our Fellow Mortals? When he empties Towns and Cities of their Inhabitants, when the devouring Pestilence seizes upon one Town, one Village after another, notwithstanding all the Precautions that can be used, deriding the Skill of the Physicians, eluding the Force of Medicines, and triumphing over all the Methods made use of to put a Check unto it? Should we not in such a Day as this is cry out with the *Psalmist*, *My Flesh* Psal. cxix.
trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid 120.
of thy Judgments? God expects we should not stand unconcern'd Spectators of the Calamities which others groan under. Give me leave to address my self to you in the Words of the Prophet, *A Voice of Noise* Isa. lxvi. 6.
from the City, a Voice from the Temple, a Voice of the Lord that rendreth Recompence to his Enemies. We have had a Voice from *Poland, Sweden, and Denmark*

mark formerly, and now a Voice from *France*, that sounds louder than any of the former. And shall not this awaken a secure and sinful Nation? Shall not this rouse us out of our Stupidity and Carelessness? At his Rebuke the Mountains quake, and the Hills tremble: and shall our Hearts remain more hard, more unrelenting than the very Rocks? Shall our Ears be stop'd against that awful Voice, which Winds and Seas, and all the raging Elements do chearfully obey? Tho' we cannot *understand the Thunder of his Power*, we should dread the Thoughts of being crush'd and confounded by it. If we will not fear this great and terrible Name, the Lord our God, nothing can be expected, but that he should make our Plagues wonderful. That Cup of Trembling which is put into the Hands of a neighbouring Nation, is not design'd by Providence to be a stupifying Potion to us or them.

2. This Judgment lets us see the utter Inability of any People to secure themselves when God has a Controversy with them. If any Nation could promise it self Security, *France* is that Nation; a rich and populous Kingdom, its Members compacted and knit together: A very great part of it is wash'd, and consequently defended by

by the Sea: and its Frontiers by Land are secured by a strong Barrier; by well fortified Towns and numerous Garrisons. But what doth all this avail when God hath a Controversy with them? What Shield can protect them from the Arrows shot out of his Quiver? If he speaks the Word, the very Air we breath in shall convey Poyson to our Lungs, or the Ground we tread on shall open its greedy Jaws, and swallow us up alive. He can make Frogs, Lice and Locusts, the most despicable Insects, to become the Executioners of his just Wrath and Vengeance. *God came from Teman*, Hab. iii. 5. *and the Holy One from Mount Paran; before him went the Pestilence, and burning Coals were under his Feet.* If the Lord of Hosts gives it a Commission, no Bars or Gates can hinder it from entering into a City: It triumphs over the Art of the Wise, and the Power of the Mighty. No keeping this Enemy at a distance, no driving it from our Gates.

3. This Judgment farther calls upon us to try and examine our selves. *Let us* Lam. iii. 40. *search and try our Ways, and turn unto the Lord our God.* We are apt to censure others; but how few judge and condemn themselves. We are ready to exclaim against the Hypocrisy of one, the

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Profane-

Profaneness of another, the Avarice and Knavery of a third Person. But where is the Man that bewails the Deadness and Hardness of his own Heart, or the Unprofitableness of his Life? Where the Man that lays his Hand upon his Bosom, and propounds these serious Questions to his own Conscience? What have I done? How much have I contributed to the common Stock of Guilt? How much Weight have I added to the pulling down God's Judgments upon a sinful Nation? How much Fuel have I heaped up to the inflaming his Vengeance against us? What Hand have my Sins had in widening the Breach betwixt the King of Heaven and the Land of my Nativity? These, my beloved, are seasonable and awful Questions; and such as the present Posture of Affairs seem to call for. If we have not the same Sins with our Neighbours, who are smarting under God's Rod, yet ours are of a very provoking Nature, and cloath'd with more aggravating Circumstances. They are plunged in superstitious Errors; but do not we hold the *Truth in Unrighteousness*? They worship Creatures, and are not we defective in that Homage and Adoration that is due to the great Creator? We *abhor their Idols*; but do we not *commit Sacrilege*? Robbing God of that Time,
 Strength

Strength and Vigour which ought to be devoted to, and employed in his Service. They are bigotted, and it may be, some of them, bloody, cruel Papists; and how many amongst us are debauch'd and vicious Protestants? And it becomes us to enquire, whether we are not of their Number. In such a Day as this, let us deal impartially with our own Souls. 'Tis such a Conduct as this, that the great Lord of the Universe expects and requires; as we may learn from his own Word. The Sword is without, and the Pestilence within —

But they that escape of them shall be on the Mountains, like Doves of the Valleys, Ezek. vii. 16.
all of them mourning, every one for his Iniquity. Would every Man sweep his own Doors the Streets would soon be clean: would every Man lament and reform what is amiss in his own Management, we should quickly see Religion look with a more chearful Aspect through our Land. Let us not be so vain as to conclude that we are better because we *fare* better than our Neighbours. What our Saviour said to the *Jews* formerly, may with a little Variation be applied to us now. *Those eighteen on whom the Tower of Siloam fell and slew,* Luke xiii. 4.
think you that they were sinners above all that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you nay, but except you repent you shall all likewise
D
perish.

perish. So may I say, do you think that the Inhabitants of *Dantzic* and *Copenhagen*, *Stockholm* and *Hamburg* amongst the Protestants; or the Inhabitants of *Warsaw*, *Aix* and *Marseilles* amongst the Papists have been greater Sinners than the Inhabitants of *London* and *Exon*? I must tell you, that you have no Warrant to draw such an Inference as this, from the Plagues which they have *felt*, and we have hitherto *escap'd*: But I am authoriz'd to assure you, in the Name of my great Lord and Master, that unless you repent, you will all sooner or later perish. It becomes us therefore in *this Day of Adversity* to consider.

Ecclef. vii.
14.

4. God further calls upon us by his Rod to reform whatever, upon a strict Examination, we find to be amiss. *When thy Judgments are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness.* That is, they will do so, if they act as becomes reasonable Creatures, and answer the Design of God's providential Dispensations. This is what he expects and loudly calls for. Thus he expresses himself by one of his Prophets; *I have cut off the Nations, their Towers are desolate, I have made their Streets waste, their Cities are destroyed, without Inhabitant.*

Isa. xxvi. 9.

Zeph. iii. 6.

bitant. I said surely they will fear me, they will receive Instruction. The Shipwreck of others should make us cautious how we dash against the same Rock. That Rod which lies so heavy on our Neighbours Backs should have a humbling Influence upon our Hearts and Lives. Divine Providence calls upon us this Day to hear and fear, and do no more so wickedly. *Because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel; viz. in* Amos iv. 12. a Way of Repentance and Reformation. When God would paint out the Sin of *Judah* in its most odious Colours, he mentions this as a very aggravating Circumstance: *Thy Sister Sodom was not mentioned by thee in the Day of thy Pride.* q. d. Thou tookest no Warning by those tremendous Judgments which I inflicted upon that rebellious City: Thou hast repeated the same Crimes which laid that Town in Ashes; and been guilty of the same detestable Impurities, which brought down Fire and Brimstone upon the Heads of its deprav'd Inhabitants.

5. God's Judgments inflicted upon others, call upon us, to admire the distinguishing Mercy of God in sparing us to this very Moment. 'Tis Mercy, not Merit, that hath made such a visible Distinction betwixt

England and her Sister Nations. If we are more *healthy*, 'tis not because we have been less *sinful*: 'Tis not for want of Provocations received *from us*, that the Hand of God is not stretched out *against us*. Instead of making others Warnings unto us, he might have made us a Warning unto them. We have abus'd our Mercies, and 'tis a Wonder that a jealous God has not depriv'd us of 'em. We have rioted, and grown wanton in our green Pastures, and he might justly hedge up our Way with Thorns and Briars. How justly might Death ride triumphant in those Streets, in which the Majesty of Heaven is so frequently, so daringly affronted? We have only tasted some few Drops of his Displeasure, whilst the full Viols of his Wrath have been poured down upon our Neighbour's Heads. He hath only laid his Finger upon us, whilst others have been crush'd with the Weight of his whole Loins. This is the Lord's doing, and it should be marvellous in our Eyes. If our Air be not fill'd with pestilential Vapours, 'tis not because it has not been polluted with Oaths and Blasphemies. If the Ground on which we tread, be not strewed with our Carcases, and drench'd with our Blood, 'tis not because it has not been burdened by our Impieties. We have Reason therefore
to

to cry out with the Psalmist, *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy Name do we give Glory.*

6. This Rod calls upon us to be fervent and frequent in our Supplications to the Throne of Divine Grace. Pray we should for the Provinces under God's afflicting Hand, that he would make them sensible of what they have done amiss. Particularly, in pulling down his Temples, in banishing his faithful Ministers, and persecuting such of his People, as dared not to worship the Creature instead of the Creator. I know, it becomes not us to interpret Divine Providences according to our own Fancies, since there is one Event to the Good and to the Bad. However it may not be amiss to observe, that the Plague began in a Town where hundreds of Protestant Confessors had been dragging of their Chains: *Marseilles* being the usual Harbour where the *French* King kept his Gallies, to which many of those Christian Heroes were condemn'd, of whom the World was not worthy, and in which they endured inexpressible Hardships. May we not reasonably suppose that many of the Souls of those brave and generous Sufferers are now under the Altar, crying out, *How long, O Lord holy and true, dost thou not judge*

judge and avenge our Blood on them that dwell on the Earth? Would to God that the Persons concern'd would lay these things to Heart, and repent of their blind, malignant Zeal: considering how tenderly Christ resents the Injuries that are done to his Members; how he feels the Weight of their Chains, and the Smart of their Wounds, and sympathises with them in all their Afflictions.

But in an especial manner, let us pray for the Land of our Nativity, that God would keep the Plague at a Distance from our Habitations: that we may not pledge them in that deadly bitter Cup of which they have drunk so very deep. This is what we are directed to by the Prophet

Joel ii. 15, 17. *Joel. Blow the Trumpet in Sion, sanctify a Fast, call a solemn Assembly: Let the Priests, the Ministers of the Lord, weep between the Porch and the Altar, and let them say, Spare thy People, O Lord, and give not thine Heritage to Reproach. When God's Hand is lifted up, he expects that we should lie prostrate at his Feet. When his Rod is shaken over our Heads, he expects to find us upon our Knees. 'Tis but reasonable he should hear from us, when he is loudly calling to us. This is a Method we are directed to, by the Example*

Example and Success of Pious *Moses*. Take *Num. xvi.*
a Censer (says he to *Aaron* the High- 46.
 Priest) and put Fire therein from the Al-
 tar, and go quickly into the Congrega-
 tion; for there is Wrath gone out from
 the Lord, the Plague is begun: And *Aa-*
ron did so, and stood between the living
 and the dead, and the Plague was stai-
 ed. O that we could cry mightily to
 our God this Day! That our Prayers might
 come up before him as Incense, and the
 lifting up of our Hands as the Evening Sa-
 crifice! Then might we hope that he would
 appoint to us Salvation for Walls and Bul-
 warks. Let us cry and sigh for the Abo-
 minations of the Land in which we live.
 Whilst others, by their Impieties, are widen-
 ing the Breach, and letting in an Inun-
 dation of Misery upon us, let us stand
 in the Gap, and by our fervent Suppli-
 cations, endeavour to turn away Wrath
 from our *Israel*. When the Land of *Ju-*
dah was in Danger of God's Judgments,
 by reason of the horrid Depravation of their
 Morals, we read, *The Lord saw there was Isa. lix. 16;*
no Man, and wondred there was no Inter-
cessor. Their Silence and Stupidity in these
 Circumstances was Matter of Astonishment
 and Wonder.

7. The last Duty we seem to be summoned unto by the Providence of God, is to be in a Readiness for the coming of our great Lord. If the Plague should spare us, it can't be long before some Distemper or other will prove fatal to us. Let us therefore give all *Diligence to make our Calling and Election sure*: to secure to our selves an Interest in the Blood and Merits of our dear Redeemer. And then we shall not be afraid of evil Tidings, when our Heart is fixed trusting in the Lord. We may then see Light, though the *Pestilence walks in Darknes* round about us: And be safe, though Destruction wasteth at Noon Day. Come Sword, come Pestilence or Famine, we need not be dismay'd or cast down. Tho' our Carcases should lie unburied in the Streets, 'tis no great matter, if our Souls are safe in *Abraham's Bosom*. Though our Relations and Acquaintance should keep at a Distance from us: Tho' we should have no Friend near us, to close our dying Eyes; we shall have a Guard of Angels, to convey us to the yonder Regions of Bliss and Glory. And that is infinitely better. Then Death it self will be able to do us no real Injury. It may shake in Pieces our earthly Tabernacle; but we shall have a Building, an House not made with

with Hands, eternal in the Heavens. It may strip us of our Rags of Dust and of Mortality ; but these will be exchange'd for Robes of Light and Glory. Death having lost its Sting, we may receive it into our Bosoms without any Consternation. The Poyson being all taken out of this bitter Cup, we may drink it off without Reluctance. When our Flesh and our Heart shall fail, God will then be *the Strength of our Heart, and our Portion for ever.*

Thus have I endeavoured to shew you what those Duties are, which the Judgments of God at home and abroad do call us to the Practice of. And by this you may easily know when you may be said to *Hear the Rod, and him that has appointed it.* Even when you are awakened to a Sense, both of your Sin and Danger. When, upon a narrow Scrutiny, and strict Enquiry, into the Frame and Temper of your own Minds, you reform what is amiss. When you endeavour to make your Peace with God thro' Christ, and to demean your selves according to the various Aspects of Divine Providence towards you.

III. I shall conclude what I have to say with a short, but serious Exhortation to
E you

Jer. vi.
8.

you all, to answer the Design and End of God in his most righteous and awful Dispensations: and to learn those Lessons which he is teaching you, by the Tokens of his Displeasure, gone forth against a provoking, sinful Generation. Methinks I hear him speaking to you this Day as formerly to the *Jewish Church and Nation*. *Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem [O England] lest my Soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a Land not inhabited.* And Woe would be unto us should God depart from us. Should he withdraw his Presence and Protection, he leaves us naked and expos'd to a thousand Mischiefs that are ready to invade us. 'Tis a dreadful thing to fall *out* of God's Hands, as well as to fall *into* them: To be forsaken of his Mercy, as well as to be overtaken of his Vengeance. To render what I have said more effectual, I shall subjoin these two Considerations, and so dismiss you.

Ezek. ix.
4, 6.

1. If you *hear God's Rod*, you have Reason to hope that he will hear your Prayers. That your Petitions will be successful to avert those Judgments that we fear, and to continue the Mercies we do yet enjoy. We read of a *Mark set upon the Foreheads of those who did sigh and cry for the Abominations committed in the midst of Jerusalem,*
and

and the destroying Angel had a Charge not to come near them. The Intercession of *Abraham* would have been prevalent even for *Sodom* it self, if ten righteous Persons could have been found in that ungodly City. A Book of Remembrance was written for those that *feared the Lord, and called upon his Name: and they shall be mine,* ^{Mal. iii. 17.} *saieth the Lord, in the Day that I make up my Jewels, and I will spare them as a Man spareth his own Son that serveth him.* God values and secures such as Men do their Jewels, whilst he tramples others, like Dirt and Rubbish, under his Feet. This should oblige us to be importunate and earnest in our Addresses to the Throne of Divine Grace. If our Ears are open to God's awful Summons, his will not be shut against our humble Supplications.

2. However, if he may not think fit to remove his Rod from us, he will support us under it, and do us good by it. If he casts us into the Furnace of Affliction, 'tis to melt down our Dross, not to consume our Substance: and the Fruit of all will be the taking away of Sin. We have a gracious Promise for our Encouragement. *All things shall work together for good to them that love God.* ^{Rom. viii. 28.} The best of Men are not exempted from National Calamities. Those Bodies

Bodies that are the Temples of the Holy Ghost, are liable to Infection, as well as those that are prostituted to the vilest Lust. But then they have the Testimony of a good Conscience, and the Hopes of a blessed Immortality for their Support. That Tempest that tosses them, drives them nearer to their desired Harbour. And *those light Afflictions which are but for a Moment, will work out for them a more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.*

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